

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.

Controlling Culmination at all Levels of Conflict:  
A Historical Perspective for Future Applications

By: R. Gordon Fogg  
LCDR USN

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

20000621 121

*R. Gordon Fogg* LCDR USN

8 February 2000

*D. Grant*

Capt. Dorothy Grant, USN

Department of Strategy and Policy

**DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A**  
Approved for Public Release  
Distribution Unlimited

## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
6. Office Symbol: NWC CODE 1C		7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207	
8. Title (Include Security Classification): UNCLASSIFIED Controlling Culmination at all Levels of Conflict: A Historical Perspective for Future Applications			
9. Personal Authors: LCDR R. Gordon Fogg, USN			
10. Type of Report: FINAL		11. Date of Report: 8 February 2000	
12. Page Count: 24		<i>Advisor: Capt D. Grant, USN</i>	
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: Continuity, Culmination, Operational Art, Tempo, War termination, Operational pause, Limited war, Coalition warfare, service doctrine, Future operations.			
15. Abstract: The purpose of this monograph is to analyze the tension that exists between the concepts of continuity and culmination. While continuity states a commander must exploit every initiative presented to keep the enemy under unrelenting pressure, culmination is the result of carrying one's attack too far and can result in dire consequences. The interplay between these concepts presents the operational commander with many important questions. How far should an attack be pressed? Should continuity or culmination be the overriding principle? Do these ideas have applications at all levels of war, and are they pertinent to future conflicts? The methodology used to help answer these questions was three-fold. First, doctrine was inspected both at the joint and service levels for guidance on balancing these principles. Next, historical case studies were analyzed to see how operational commanders had controlled these principles, both in unlimited and limited war. Finally, the effects of future operational principles, such as those delineated in Joint Vision 2010, were studied for their impact on continuity and culmination. This monograph concludes that culmination and continuity is adequately addressed in Joint doctrine but is inconsistently discussed in the various service doctrine. From a historical perspective, the operational commander should be most concerned with culmination in unlimited war and continuity, especially in the war termination phase during limited war. Finally, although the harnessing of future technologies will undoubtedly improve the efficiency of combat, it will not entirely remove the possibility of culmination.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified  X	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
19. Telephone: 841-6461		20. Office Symbol: C	

## Abstract of

### CONTROLLING CULMINATION AT ALL LEVELS OF CONFLICT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR FUTURE

The purpose of this monograph is to analyze the tension that exists between the concepts of continuity and culmination. While continuity states a commander must exploit every initiative presented to keep the enemy under unrelenting pressure, culmination is the result of carrying one's attack too far and can result in dire consequences. The interplay between these concepts presents the operational commander with many important questions. How far should an attack be pressed? Should continuity or culmination be the overriding principle? Do these ideas have applications at all levels of war, and are they pertinent to future conflicts?

The methodology used to help answer these questions was three-fold. First, doctrine was inspected both at the joint and service levels for guidance on balancing these principles. Next, historical case studies were analyzed to see how operational commanders had controlled these principles, both in unlimited and limited war. Finally, the effects of future operational principles, such as those delineated in Joint Vision 2010, were studied for their impact on continuity and culmination.

This monograph concludes that culmination and continuity is adequately addressed in Joint doctrine but is inconsistently discussed in the various service doctrine. From a historical perspective, the operational commander should be most concerned with culmination in unlimited war and continuity, especially in the war termination phase, during limited war. Finally, although the harnessing of future technologies will undoubtedly improve the efficiency of combat, it will not entirely remove the possibility of culmination.

This type of knowledge [military genius] cannot be forcibly produced by an apparatus of scientific formulas and mechanics; it can only be gained through a talent for judgment, and by the application of accurate judgment to the observation of man and matter. The knowledge needed by a senior commander is distinguished by the fact that it can only be attained by a special talent, through the medium of reflection, study, and thought...

(Clausewitz, *On War*)

## **Introduction:**

Carl von Clausewitz is indisputably one of the most influential theorists of modern warfare. His concepts and principles are prevalent in both our different service and Joint doctrines. Yet despite the clarity and insight he has provided into the dynamic interaction of nations in conflict, his works contain contradictory principles which make the conduct of war so difficult to control. Two such concepts are the idea of continuity and culmination. The idea of continuity, as Clausewitz explains it, states a commander must exploit every initiative presented to keep the enemy under unrelenting pressure. Any break in the offensive will provide time for the defender to regain combat power and potentially negate the attack. Culmination, on the other hand, is a result of carrying one's attack too far and can create apocalyptic repercussions for the operational commander. The tension between these concepts frames some pertinent and challenging questions. How far should the attack be pressed? Should continuity or culmination be the overriding principle? Is there an operating sequence that will keep these concepts in balance? Do these concepts have applications at all levels of war, and are they pertinent to future conflicts? While Clausewitz offers little firm testimony to answer these questions, modern history is replete with examples of these concepts in tension. From analyzing the circumstances surrounding these examples, some general guidelines can be established, which the operational commander can utilize when both planning and conducting military operations.

## Doctrinal Impacts

Principles and rules are intended to provide a thinking man with a frame of reference for the movements he has been trained to carry out, rather than to serve as a guide which at the moment of action lays down precisely the path he must take.

(Clausewitz, *On War*)

### Continuity:

Clausewitz was a strong believer in initiative, pressure, and offensive warfare. His theory of continuity states that the commander must use every asset at his disposal to exploit an advantage. By applying unrelenting pressure the commander denies his opponent the opportunity to regroup and regain his balance. "Once a major victory is achieved there must be no talk of rest, of a breathing space, or reviewing the position or consolidating and so forth, but only of the pursuit."<sup>1</sup> Also implied in this concept is that the losing side will look for every opportunity to disengage from the attacker and to generate time to increase his strength for future operations.<sup>2</sup>

Although not in name, the spirit of continuity is prevalent throughout our various doctrinal publications, especially with regard to the accepted Principles of War. The principle of "offensive" is defined in U.S. joint principles of war as the need "to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, this principle emphasizes that a defensive posture should only be a temporary condition, and every opportunity must be exploited to regain the initiative. The concept of continuity also has influences in the principles of "mass" and "maneuver", for example "mass must be sustained to have the desired effect."<sup>4</sup> In the discussion of the principle of maneuver Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations, states "it contributes materially in exploiting successes, preserving freedom of action, and reducing vulnerability by continually posing new problems for the enemy."<sup>5</sup> Each individual

service's doctrine also emphasizes the concept of continuity when discussing the principles of war.

### **Culmination:**

Whereas the concept of continuity is consistently addressed throughout operational doctrine, the concept of culmination and its application to joint operations is less clear. Joint Pub 3-0 defines the culminating point as "the point in time and space at which an attacker's combat power no longer exceeds that of his defender."<sup>6</sup> It further emphasizes the need to secure the objective prior to culmination. While Joint Pub 3-0 explains "what" culmination is, it does not state "why" it occurs. Clausewitz's theory of culmination is based on the premise that as an attack proceeds, its combat power diminishes while normally that of the defender increases relatively. The reasons for this are multi-fold. As an attack continues, lines of communication (LOC) and lines of operations (LOO) become lengthened, straining logistical systems. Flanks become longer and more exposed; defending them may drain any quantitative advantage. Most importantly, since the defense is the stronger form of warfare, the attacker is most likely taking more substantial casualties while on the offensive.<sup>7</sup>

The defender, on the other hand, is falling back on his LOC's and LOO's making resupply and reinforcement efforts more efficient. He is defending familiar territory and most likely doing so from prepared locations. Additionally, he may have support of the local population as well as the advantage of being on the waiting side.<sup>8</sup> As a result of this interaction, there comes time in an offensive where the combat power of the attacker diminishes relative to the defender to the point when the attack should no longer be continued. Clausewitz called this the "culminating point of attack (CPA)." He stressed that to continue the attack beyond this point puts the operation at grave risk to counterattack.

Army doctrine echoes this point by stating, “here [beyond the culminating point] the attacker greatly risks counterattack and defeat and continues the attack only at great peril.”<sup>9</sup>

The importance of recognizing impending culmination is demonstrated by the art of the defense. Both Army and Joint doctrine states successful defenses are the result of delaying actions that force the attacker’s culmination. Once his resources have been depleted and combat power sufficiently reduced, the defender counter-attacks when the attacker is no longer able to defend successfully.<sup>10</sup>

Culmination can occur at all three levels of war. Army operational doctrine, though, downplays the importance of culmination at the tactical level. “Tactical overextension is less a matter of culmination than a temporary exhaustion or depletion of resources. Normally, the problem can be remedied by reinforcement, resupply, or unit substitution in a short period of time.”<sup>11</sup> This is true as long as the tactical culmination does not have operational or strategic consequences. An example of such an event is the deployment of a Patriot battery to defend a strategic location against theater ballistic missiles. If the opponent salvos more missiles into the protected area than the Patriots are capable of engaging, then the tactical engagement could have even strategic repercussions. In Clausewitzian terms, the Patriot battery had culminated upon deployment. The opponent recognized that culmination and massed his firepower to take advantage of that situation.

In his discussion of culmination, Clausewitz looks at both the operational and strategic levels of war. His operational theory of CPA is addressed in Joint, Army, and Marine Corps publications. He also identifies culmination at the strategic level, which he calls the culminating point of victory (CPV). He theorizes that the CPV occurs when military action has been sufficient to gain the desired political results.<sup>12</sup> Just as with the CPA,

Clausewitz states that to press the attack beyond this CPV risks strategic defeat. "If one were to go beyond that point, it would not merely be a *useless* effort which could not add to success. It would in fact be a *damaging* one, which would lead to a reaction; and experience goes to show that such reactions usually have completely disproportionate effects."<sup>13</sup>

Clausewitz lists several reasons why pressing the attack beyond the CPV is dangerous, of which two are particularly pertinent to modern operations. The first is that operations beyond the CPV may result in a change in political alignments, both in friendly and hostile coalitions. The second is that as a people of a nation become increasingly threatened they are more likely to steel their resolve and increase their resistance. This concept is most applicable when the complete destruction of the opposing forces is not the goal (read limited aims). While the CPV is not directly discussed in Joint doctrine, many of the tenets of the concept are present in U.S. operational literature. CPV is primarily a war termination issue and the various service and Joint doctrine stress the importance of tempo and leverage when analyzing this aspect of war. In limited warfare, applying the correct amount of military leverage at the decisive point and time will result in the CPV and realization of the strategic goals.<sup>14</sup> It is the responsibility of the Operational Commander to not only recognize the CPV in a dynamic and friction-filled environment, but also to ensure that his forces are synchronized at this point to maximize strategic leverage.

The concept of culmination is conspicuously absent from Navy and Air Force service publications. Is its absence a doctrinal shortfall or is culmination a principle which only applies to ground-based operations? While this is a contentious issue, it can be argued that both air power and sea power are susceptible to the principle of culmination, but in a different way. If a strike package is relying on EW assets to protect it in the target area, yet



due to resource limitations none are available, then that strike has culminated. If the JFACC decides to continue the mission past this culminating point of attack, the package is at risk for failure. The lack of EW assets in this case reduced the combat power of that package below that of the opponent.

Since its inception air power has been touted for its asymmetric capabilities. The early pioneers and theorists of military aviation such as Giulio Douhet and Billy Mitchell espoused that air power could be uniquely strategic. These theories, adopted by the Air Corps Tactical School in the 1930's, and still supported by many in the military today, argue that by targeting enemy transportation, industry, and supply, strategic bombing could compel the opponent to quit due to his loss of critical infrastructure. These strategic airpower enthusiasts claimed that energy and assets dedicated to defensive airpower were wasteful and inefficient. The rallying cry of these strategic bombing zealots was "the bomber will always get through."<sup>15</sup> The early years of World War II proved them wrong. Slow, unescorted bombers were easy prey for the German Luftwaffe and the Allies sustained huge losses.

It seems that once again the strategic bombing disciples are gaining favor. With a new motto "the stealth bomber will always get through," offensive air and strategic bombing are dominating air operations. Colonel Meilinger's *Ten Propositions Regarding Airpower* is a contemporary twist of Douhet, Mitchell, and Royal Air Force Commander Sir Hugh Trenchard. By using their concepts, Col. Meilinger inverts Clausewitz's theory that the defense is the stronger form of war when applied to airpower. By incorporating the dimensions of height and time, he argues that offensive operations are the stronger form of aerial warfare. Echoing the beliefs of earlier generations of strategic airpower enthusiasts, he states "radar will be watchful for an air attacker, but terrain masking, electronic measures,

careful routing, and stealth technology make it extremely difficult to anticipate and prepare for an air assault."<sup>16</sup> The bomber will always get through.

Reading these doctrinal pieces the Operational Commander could come to the conclusion that air forces are impervious to culmination. Other factors, though, need to be considered. Certainly the United States enjoys a numerical and technological advantage, which virtually ensures air supremacy in most of the theaters that we operate today. This could change, though, in the very near future. Improved area denial systems such as "double digit" SAM's (SA-10, 11,12) will significantly reduce our operating sanctuaries. High tech acoustic and skin friction trackers may negate the advantages currently enjoyed by low observable aircraft. Other factors, out of the span of control of the operational commander, can greatly affect air power effectiveness. Issues such as weather, ROE limitations, collateral damage restrictions, overflight rights, target set reductions, and asset limitations can all reduce the capability of air power to accomplish its mission. Whether this degradation results in culmination will depend on the magnitude of these issues. All of the aforementioned affected the tempo of operations in the air war in Kosovo. Lt Gen Short, who was the JFACC for NATO operations, was extremely adamant about the consequences these restrictions placed on his ability to synchronize effects in that theater.<sup>17</sup>

Naval doctrine also lacks any discussion of culmination. Like Air Force doctrine it stresses sustainability through augmentation and resupply of both personnel and ships. By using a well established logistical supply network and underway replenishment, Battle Groups have the ability to sustain their mission indefinitely.<sup>18</sup> When one looks at today's U.S. Navy from a Mahanian perspective it is difficult to envision culmination. Due to the overwhelming superiority in firepower, any fleet-on-fleet engagement would be devastating

for the enemy. Upon closer examination, though, the Navy, just like the air force, has its vulnerabilities. Sustainability assumes unthreatened LOC's. Supply ships currently travel unescorted and unimpeded. If these LOC's are challenged, the Navy will be forced to make some difficult decisions. Due to the reduction of ships, the Navy no longer has sufficient platforms both to accomplish its mission and to protect its LOC's. If the Navy were to take combatants to escort supply vessels, it would risk insufficient mass at the decisive point. If it elects to leave its LOC's unprotected, it risks its sustainability. In either case culmination is a possible result.

The Navy's latest operational concept "forward from the sea" creates some added culmination problems. Operating in the littorals opens up vulnerabilities to asymmetric threats that are significantly less in blue water operations. Mines, surface-to-surface anti-ship missiles and diesel submarines create force protection problems in restricted water-space. Any of these systems can attrite integral offensive and defensive platforms, which could cause Battle Group culmination. As the number of navy combatants has been reduced, the size of the Battle Group has been reduced also. Through technological advances and multi-mission tasking, fewer ships are required to perform the requisite Battle Group missions. This efficiency, though, has a downside in that it significantly increases the effect of a loss of a single platform. Admiral Cebrowski in his many addresses on Network Centric Warfare has called for increased robustness within the battle group. He wants to ensure that the battle group can not be rendered indefensible by the loss of a single platform. This robustness would reduce the chance of culmination due to attrition.

### **Controlling Culmination:**

Each service's doctrine discusses the importance of logistic support and its relation to sustainability. Joint Pub 3-0 states "synchronization of logistics with combat operations can forestall culmination and help commanders control the tempo of their operations."<sup>19</sup>

Through sophisticated modeling and detailed planning, logisticians can approximate the anticipated drain on resources. When this calculus is incorporated with forecast material throughput, the operational commander can adjust the tempo of operations and be reasonably assured that his objective can be reached prior to culmination. Army doctrine has the most detailed discussion of forestalling operational culmination. By sequencing operations into logical phases the commander is better able to control the tempo of operations.

Since "no plan of operations can be projected with confidence much beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main force,"<sup>20</sup> branches and sequels are devised to provide the operational commander flexibility and freedom of action. By war-gaming these options, logistical shortfalls can be identified and tempo can be adjusted to prevent culmination. If shortfalls in combat power are identified, the commander may be forced to take an operational pause to regenerate his strength. These operational pauses are normally planned for phase transitions. By doing this the continuity of operations within each phase can be maintained.

### **Historical Analysis:**

Clausewitz's writings were heavily influenced by the Napoleonic Wars, and his concept of culmination was derived from the Russian campaign of 1812. As Napoleon proceeded deeper into Russia he entered an unfamiliar and hostile theater of operations. In

order to protect his LOC's he was forced to garrison troops at vulnerable supply points. His exposed flanks were susceptible to partisan attacks, and as he continued into Russia his combat power was depleted to the point where the Russians were able to counterattack and decimate his force. As a result, Napoleon culminated operationally prior to reaching his strategic objectives.<sup>21</sup>

World War II also offers classic examples of operational culmination. In this regard, the German invasion of Russia in 1941 was nearly identical to Napoleon's failed invasion. The Germans, whose goal was the destruction of the Russian Army, adhered to the theory of continuity and relentlessly pursued the retreating Red Army. The Russians took advantage of the delaying defense to move their critical strategic infrastructure beyond the reach of the advancing Germans. Hitler's unyielding attack philosophy drove the Germans beyond their CPA, which doomed the operation to failure. When the Russians elected to counterattack, the Germans had expended the bulk of their combat power and were unable to transition to an effective defense. Following this blunder the Germans never completely regained the initiative on the eastern front.

The Allied invasion of Europe in 1944 is an excellent example of the conflict between continuity and culmination. Under the original plan of Operation Overlord, an operational pause was planned at the Seine River following the breakout from the Normandy region. This pause was critical to establish the logistical infrastructure necessary for the push through Western Europe. Following the landing, the Allies were confronted with heavy resistance in the hedgerow terrain of Northern France. As a result of this resistance, the breakout phase of the operation took much longer than anticipated. Once the breakout occurred, though, it was swift and total. Advances that were estimated to take more than two months were realized in

less than one. With the Germans in full retreat, Eisenhower elected to forego the originally planned operational pause and continue his advance toward the German frontier.

This freewheeling action ended in September of 1944, when Eisenhower called a halt to offensive operations on the western front at the Meuse River. This controversial decision was based on Eisenhower's determination that the Allied advance had outrun its logistical support. He believed that although the German army was in retreat, it still had significant combat power and unabated pursuit might cause an Allied culmination. By taking an operational pause at this point, he was regenerating logistical and combat power that would be required for the final push into Germany. Eisenhower's generals saw the situation differently. Both Patton and Montgomery believed that an operational pause at this point in the campaign would allow time for the Germans to regain their balance and dig into defensive positions along the Siegfried line. They felt the German forces were severely crippled and that continuous pressure would lead to their collapse. They argued that by adhering to the concept of continuity the Allies could quickly end the war.<sup>22</sup>

In retrospect it seems that Eisenhower was correct. The delay in capturing the critical port of Antwerp, as well as the rapid pace at which supplies were consumed during the push east, put the Allied armies in a tenuous logistical position. The ability of the Germans to launch a credible counterattack was demonstrated by their advance into the Ardennes in December 1944. While it is unknown what the outcome would have been had this operational pause been neglected, what is evident is that Eisenhower understood the relationship between continuity and culmination. He was willing to cede the initiative temporarily to the enemy in order to prevent the potentially more serious prospect of culmination.<sup>23</sup>

The two constants in each of these examples were that they took place in unlimited war in which the military objective was the complete destruction of the opposing forces, and that the defender had strategic depth that could be used to trade terrain for time. In each case the attacking armies gained a significant initial advantage, and unremittingly pursued the retreating forces in quest of a quick victory. The defenders, on the other hand, were willing and able to trade terrain for time. They used this time to regenerate combat power since they had the space required to allow an organized and efficient retreat. By effectively delaying they drew the attacker towards his point of culmination. In each of the Russian examples this point was either unrecognized or ignored and the results were catastrophic. Along the western front, however, culmination was anticipated and the Allies were able to mount a successful defense until the required power to retake the offensive had been regenerated.

Limited wars have historically shown a different relationship between continuity and culmination. In these conflicts, strategic culmination, not operational, has been the significant factor. Identifying the correct CPV and exerting the necessary tempo to gain the desired political goals have proved challenging in limited warfare. A good example of correctly utilizing Clausewitz's idea of the CPV is the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. Prussia initiated this limited war to reduce Austrian influence within the Confederation of German States. Following the overwhelming victory of the Prussian Army over the Austrians at the Battle of Koniggratz, Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck ceased military operations yet was still able to secure his limited aims from the Hapsburg monarchy. During this conflict the Prussian military leadership under Von Molke had advised Kaiser Wilhelm to press the attack and destroy the Austrian army. Had the Kaiser followed this advice, several things could have happened. The French or Russians, sensing the swing in balance of power, could

have come to Austria's aid. This would have escalated this limited conflict into a regional war. Additionally, the Austrians could have redeployed southern forces to protect their capital and fought a delaying action.<sup>24</sup> This also would have denied the Prussians their quick decisive victory. Thus, the Battle of Koniggratz was the Prussian CPV. Bismarck recognized it, Molke did not.

More recent examples with less glorious outcomes were the United States' involvement in Korea and Vietnam. The Korean conflict is particularly interesting for it contains examples of the U.S. forces both over-shooting and failing to reach the CPV. After the Inchon landing in September 1950, General MacArthur pushed his forces deep into North Korea in an attempt to unify the peninsula. As UN forces approached the Yalu River, China entered the conflict by committing up to one million troops. By significantly increasing the war aims, the United States went beyond their CPV, and as Clausewitz predicted, the Chinese intervened. By the spring of 1951, UN forces had not only halted the final Chinese counteroffensive, but were aggressively pursuing a decisively defeated Chinese military. This time, the U.S.-led push north came to a halt along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel when communist leadership expressed a desire to negotiate an armistice. During this break in the action, Chinese and North Korean forces were able to regroup and fortify very defensible positions. Once they had secured a proper defensive posture, the communist governments felt they no longer had to accept dictated terms. In this phase of the war, UN forces failed to reach their CPV. By easing the tempo of operations, the United States failed to take advantage of military leverage in order to secure their strategic objectives. By taking this operational pause in the summer of 1951, the United States ceded the initiative, allowed the Chinese forces to replenish their combat power, and extended the conflict by two more bloody years.



Had the United States taken limited North Korean territory with which to negotiate and/or fought and negotiated at the same time, they might have had the required tempo and leverage to reach their CPV.

This mistake of terminating operations during negotiations was repeated often during the Vietnam conflict. The North Vietnamese routinely tied bombing halts to participation in peace talks. During these halts, their forces fortified their air defense systems and regenerated combat power, with no apparent intention to cease operations in South Vietnam. The enemy was able to dictate United State's tempo and use the time they created to their operational and strategic advantage. These two examples show that until political goals have been secured, military operations should continue. Both the political leadership and the operational commander need to be wary of enemy intentions when presented with conditional cease-fires.

The Bush administration as well as Coalition leader General Swartzkopf has been criticized for stopping the Persian Gulf War too soon. Some people believe if the coalition forces had pressed further north threatening Baghdad that a more strategically favorable solution could have been reached. While there is little doubt that the United States wanted to claim a quick victory and prevent further casualties, the U.N.-mandated operational goal was the removal of Iraqi troops from Kuwaiti soil.<sup>25</sup> For the United States, the retreat of Iraqi military forces from Kuwait was the CPV. Had allied forces continued the effort north and threatened Baghdad, the United States risked the splintering of the tenuous Arab coalition, loss of legitimacy, and potentially a wider conflict.

## **Future Conflict**

The future tenets of U.S. military strategy are encapsulated in Joint Vision 2010 (JV2010). This document gives U.S. forces a road-map to guide them into the information dominated battlespace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. JV2010 describes four operational concepts central to the conduct of future operations: dominant maneuver, precision engagement, full dimensional protection, and focused logistics. The Concept for Future Joint Operations, a follow up to Joint Vision 2010 states "various factors should render culmination an unlikely situation in 2010 joint operations."<sup>26</sup> This document states that focused logistics will prevent culmination from lack of fuel, food, munitions and spare parts. In addition, full dimensional protection, precision engagement and dominant maneuver will increase relative combat power and reduce susceptibility of culmination due to attrition. Finally, information superiority will give the operational commander total battlespace awareness. Theoretically, if the commander has accurate information on the strength of his opponent, he can maximize the tempo of his operations, reaching his objective prior to culminating.<sup>27</sup>

While these concepts will no doubt reduce the chance of culmination at the tactical and operational level, it is short sighted to think that this concept is no longer applicable to operational art. Our political leadership has made it clear that operations in the future will not only be joint, but combined.<sup>28</sup> In the coalition warfare of the Kosovo conflict, the United States relearned that it might not be in total control of the strategic and operational implementation of war. The United States will not necessarily be able to operate at the desired tempo either due to interoperability problems or political misgivings. It might not be allowed to engage all the desired targets or even plan certain operations. These constraints and restraints could lead to culmination, especially against a determined opponent who is

strategically minded. Finally, while the concepts of JV2010 will undoubtedly improve the execution of the mission, they do not aid the operational commander in defining what that mission should be. The first question an operational commander must answer is “what military conditions must be met in order to gain the desired political results?” If this question is improperly answered, strategic culmination is virtually guaranteed.

Neither the National Security Strategy nor the National Military Strategy predicts the rise of a peer competitor in the foreseeable future. While they stress the need to be prepared to handle the full spectrum of military conflict, these documents envision that conflicts will most likely be for limited aims against regional hegemons. The more “limited” the aims are in these conflicts, the more “control” the military can expect from political and coalition leadership. This could create an interesting paradox. While the military invokes doctrinal, organizational, and technological advances to rapidly increase its tempo of operations, this tempo may be unacceptable to the civilian leadership that ultimately has the final say.

Another significant difficulty in waging limited war is defining the CPV. As U.S. forces have accepted a more constabulary role in the 1990’s, they have seen the difficulty of dictating behavior through military action. A good example exists in southwest Asia. Despite the overwhelming defeat of Iraqi forces in the Gulf war, the United States is still engaged in a low intensity conflict in the air above northern and southern Iraq. Another example is the air campaign over Kosovo. After 78 days of bombing, the Serbian government agreed to withdraw all its regular and irregular forces. While on the surface this seems to indicate a NATO victory, one must remember that the agreement was reached with an indicted war criminal. Additionally, the political undertones of Kosovar independence,

the future role of Serbian forces, and the legitimacy of the KLA, which were the catalysts for the conflict, have not been resolved.<sup>29</sup>

Clausewitz certainly understood the complexities of limited warfare when he wrote, "even the ultimate outcome of war is not always regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date."<sup>30</sup> These conflicts emphasize the importance of the operational commander controlling not only the tempo during the war termination phase but also dictating the tempo of operations during the post-hostility phase.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of continuity directly translates in doctrinal terms to offensive, maneuver, mass, and tempo. If these principles are improperly applied at the operational or strategic level of war, the result could be irreversible culmination. History suggests that when fighting an opponent in an unlimited war, who has strategic depth, the urge to retain the initiative must be tempered with a realistic appraisal of relative combat strengths. In this scenario, the prudent commander will take operational pauses as required to maintain adequate combat power to reach his operational objectives. Like the proverbial tortoise and the hare, the operational commander should husband his assets so that he has sufficient combat power at the decisive point and time. When engaged in limited warfare, history offers different lessons. In limited warfare, choosing the proper military objective and maintaining significant leverage during the war termination phase are the most important decisions. Avoiding culmination will require a combination of acquiring coalition strategic synchronization and recognizing the CPV.

As the United States continues towards operational doctrine based on harnessing the power of information, it must remember that culmination will continue to be a major consideration. Every RMA in military history has been successfully (and usually quite quickly) countered, and this one will be no different. The U.S. military can not simply “wish away” culmination, and expect to operate at limitless tempos without operational and strategic ramifications. Despite technological improvements, war, as always, will continue to hinge on the human dimension. In future conflicts, the successful commander must be able to balance the operational tempo required to reach his military objective against the strategic controls imposed by the civilian leadership. Properly maintaining the balance of continuity versus culmination will continue to be a major challenge for the operational artist and most likely determine victory from defeat.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1976), 625.

<sup>2</sup> Michael I. Handel, Masters of War, Classical Strategic Thought (London: Frank Cass & Co., LTD. 1992), 99.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations (Joint Pub 3-0) (Washington, D.C.: February 1, 1995), A-1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., A-2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., III-22.

<sup>7</sup> George M. Hall, "Culminating Points," Military Review, July 1989, 79-86.

<sup>8</sup> Clausewitz, 570-571.

<sup>9</sup> Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, Operations. (Washington, D.C.: June 14, 1993), 6-8.

<sup>10</sup> Joint Pub 3-0, III-22.

<sup>11</sup> Field Manual 100-5, 6-8.

<sup>12</sup> Clausewitz, 566-573.

<sup>13</sup> Clausewitz, 570.

<sup>14</sup> Joint Pub 3-0, III-23.

<sup>15</sup> Robert F. Futrell, Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force 1907-1960, Volume I (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press), 19-34.

<sup>16</sup> Phillip S. Meilinger, "Ten Propositions Regarding Air Power" Air Power Journal, Spring 1996, 57.

<sup>17</sup> John A. Tirpak, "Short's View of the Air Campaign," Air Force Association Air Force Magazine. Vol. 82, No. 9, September 1999, 2-5.

---

<sup>18</sup> Department of the Navy, Naval Doctrinal Publication 1, Naval Warfare (Washington, D.C.: Mar 1994), 12.

<sup>19</sup> Joint Pub 3-0, III-22.

<sup>20</sup> Field Manual 100-5, 6-9.

<sup>21</sup> Handel, 120.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel J. Roh, Operational Pause vs. Offensive Culmination: Lessons in Eisenhower's Broad Front Strategy (Fort Leavenworth, KS. School of Advanced Military Studies, April 1988), 18-24.

<sup>23</sup> Roh, 1-15.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Smoke, Controlling Escalation (Boston: Harvard University Press 1977), 86.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Gordon and Gen. Bernard Trainor, The General's War, The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1995) 385-410.

<sup>26</sup> "Concept for Future Joint Operations, Expanding Joint Vision 2010," May 1997, Joint Doctrine CD-ROM, Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 1999. 64.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Lessons Learned from Military Operations and relief Efforts In Kosovo, Staff Report (Washington, D.C. Federal Information Systems Corporation, October 21, 1999), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Lessons and Non-lessons of the Air and Missile War in Kosovo," (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 20, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Clausewitz, 80.

---

## Bibliography

- Clausewitz, Carl von. On War. edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. National Military Strategy of the United States. Washington, D.C., 1997.
- Cordesman, Anthony H. "The Lessons and Non-lessons of the Air War in Kosovo." Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University. Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 20, 1999.
- Dye, Peter. "To What Extent Were Logistics Shortages Responsible for Patton's Culmination on the Meuse in 1944," Air Force Journal of Logistics. Vol. XXIII, Number 2.
- Echevarria, Antulio J. "War, Politics, and RMA- The Legacy of Clausewitz," Joint Forces Quarterly. Winter 1995-1996.
- Esper, Michael H. Defensive Culmination: A Useful Piece of Theory? Fort Leavenworth, Ks: School of Advanced Military Studies, September 16, 1991.
- Futrell, Robert F. Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force 1907-1960, Volume I. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press.
- Gordon, Michael and Trainor, Gen. Bernard. The General's War, The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995.
- Hall, George M. "Culminating Points," Military Review. July 1989.
- Handel, Michael I. Masters of War, Classical Strategic Thought. London: Frank Cass & Co., LTD., 1992.
- Kirchbach, Hans-Peter von. Clausewitz and the Culmination Point of Victory. Carlisle Barracks, Pa: U.S. Army War College, March 15, 1989.
- McGraw, Donald C. Operational Pauses: Minimizing the Effects of Culmination in Joint Operations. Fort Leavenworth, Ks.: School of Advanced Military Studies, December 13, 1991.
- Meilinger, Phillip S. "Ten Propositions Regarding Air Power." Air Power Journal, Spring 1996.
- Reed, James W. "Should Deterrence Fail: War Termination in Campaign Planning," Parameters, Summer 1993.



---

Roh, Daniel J. Operational Pause vs. Offensive Culmination: Lessons in Eisenhower's Broad Front Strategy. Fort Leavenworth, Ks: School of Advanced Military Studies, April 1988.

Smoke, Richard. Controlling Escalation. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Strednansky, Susan E. Balancing the Trinity: The Fine Art of Conflict Termination. Maxwell Air Force Base, Al.: Air University Press, February, 1996.

Terpeluk, William. "Lesson in Battle Tempo: The Union Pursuit After Gettysburg," Parameters, Autumn 1995.

Tirpak, John A. "Short's View of the Air Campaign," Air Force Association Air Force Magazine. Vol. 82, No. 9, September 1999.

U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Armed Services. Lessons Learned from Military Operations and Relief Efforts in Kosovo. Staff Report. Washington, D.C.: Federal Information Systems Corporation, October 21, 1999.

U.S. Department of the Army. FM 100-5 Operations. Washington, D.C.: June 14, 1993.

U.S. Department of the Air Force. Air Force Basic Doctrine. Washington, D.C.: September 1997.

U.S. Department of the Navy. Naval Doctrinal Publication 1, Naval Warfare (NDP-1) Washington, D.C.: Mar 1994

U.S. Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps. FMFM 1, Warfighting. Washington, D.C.: March 6, 1989.

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. "Concept for Future Joint Operations, Expanding JV2010." May 1997, Joint Doctrine CD-ROM, Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, February, 1999.

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. "Joint Vision 2010 (JV2010)." Joint Doctrine CD-ROM, Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, February, 1999.

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Doctrine for Joint Operations (Joint Pub 3-0) Washington, D.C.: February 1, 1995.

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Doctrine for Logistic Support of Joint Operations (Joint Pub 4-0) Washington, D.C.: January 27, 1995.